

# response to change

## The facts and philosophy of Ontario's new Credit System in secondary schools

This fall, a new approach to secondary school education known as the CREDIT SYSTEM is being adopted throughout Ontario.

The Credit System is a *response to change*. It is neither a sudden change in thinking, nor an experiment; it is a logical extension of the schools' continual efforts to adapt to new needs created by a fast-changing society.

The details of the Credit System have been in the planning for five years, and the new program has been gradually introduced across Ontario over the past three years.

Last year, about 80% of Ontario's high schools were following it, and this fall the remaining schools will adopt it.

The key feature of the Credit System is that it recognizes—finally—that each student is a distinct *individual*. Each student's *abilities, interests, and future plans* are different, and no longer will we treat all students as if they were the same.

Traditionally, the secondary school curriculum has been handed down from on high; the provincial Ministry of Education has dictated many of the subjects that students must take.

The assumption was, presumably, that there were experts who knew what was best for each student and who knew which subjects would best equip each and every student for his future.

But in these fast-changing times, this is a false assumption. It is not possible for the Ministry of Education to specify a list of subjects that will answer the needs of each and every student in the province.

The best-qualified experts on any student's abilities and future plans—and the school requirements to fulfil them—are his parents, his teachers, and he himself.

The Credit System recognizes this.

Now parents and students—in close collaboration with the school—can choose a package of subjects each year which will best equip the individual student for his or her future.

Under the Credit System, each student is on an individual footing instead of being locked into a group of subjects laid down by the Ministry of Education.

An important feature of the Credit System is that students are no longer forced to take subjects at levels that are clearly beyond their grasp. Previously

## An information guide for parents

October, 1972



students could be denied a graduation diploma if they were unable to master *one* subject in their prescribed package, even though their work in all other subjects was excellent.

Another feature of the new system is that students are now able to choose a more interesting and relevant *mix* of subjects, and still earn their graduation diploma.

Exciting new courses such as *Consumer Studies, World Religions, Law, Urban Studies, and People and Politics* are becoming available to students in many schools. Students who excel in such traditional academic subjects as *English and History* can often take the occasional "practical" course such as *Auto Mechanics or Typing*.

This mixing of subjects—and the overall built-in flexibility of the Credit System—will result in much higher quality education for high school students.

This booklet has been published by the Ministry of Education, Ontario, for the purpose of informing parents of recent developments in secondary school education in the province.

- So-called academic students are thriving on it, taking advantage of the new flexibility to delve deeper into their key subjects and at the same time broaden their horizons by taking a few "unrelated" courses.
- All students can add variety to their programs while specializing in a core of related subjects that are essential to their future plans and aspirations.
- Students who would ordinarily be early dropouts from high school are allowed to concentrate on their strengths instead of being forced to reach for standards set mainly for academically talented students.
- The fact that students are involved in choosing their own subjects has resulted in their being more committed to achieving success in their programs.

We in Ontario are on the threshold of a new era of *quality* in education. I know that the Credit System is quite different from the kind of program that many of us remember—but that is how it *should* be.

Ask yourself this question: Do you think that the kind of high school education *you* received would adequately equip your child to cope with the kind of society he or she will face?

What we received may have been fine for the times. But this is 1972. When today's teenagers are about age 30, the year will be 1990. Our society and our world will assuredly be very different then.

The most important thing we can give today's young people *now* is an open approach to learning. We can show them *how* to learn so they can cope with change. We must give them basic skills, but we must also broaden their horizons and insights. We must encourage them to make the most of their individual strengths and capabilities.

These are the primary aims of the Credit System.

I hope that this booklet conveys this, and also answers any questions you may have. I also hope that it will enable you to work more closely with your children's teachers in preparing for the future.

*Thomas L. Wells*

Thomas L. Wells  
Minister of Education, Ontario

# why the credit system?

"What knowledge is of the most use?"

That question, once asked by the Victorian philosopher Herbert Spencer, has concerned educators since schools and schooling began.

When social change is slow, it is possible to answer the question fairly certainly. For many years in Ontario, things were not changing so quickly that we couldn't predict, in general terms, what the next 30 or 40 years would be like. Thus it was possible to identify the knowledge and skills that would likely be of most use throughout a person's working life and to make this body of knowledge the basis for the school curriculum.

There was, in other words, general agreement on what was "the most useful kind of knowledge", and this was expressed in the provincial courses of study and in the regulations that made certain subjects in certain grades compulsory for high school graduation.

## Impossible to predict

But the rate of change has been accelerating. It is no longer possible to predict what the next 30 or 40 years will be like. It is no longer possible to confidently predict what specific skills and knowledge should be passed on to all students to best equip them for their future.

Over the years, Ontario schools have tried to adjust to the increasing complexity of our society without abandoning its basic traditions. The number of "optional" subjects gradually increased. Commercial and technical programs were added to the basic academic program.

In 1962, Ontario's high school program was reorganized under what became known as the Robarts Plan, which offered some eight different pathways through the secondary school and much greater flexibility to adapt courses to students' individual capabilities and needs.

The Robarts Plan was a vast improvement. But the rate of change in Ontario and elsewhere in the industrialized world was unprecedented. Even as the new program was put into effect, it became clear that further change was needed.

One consequence of rapid change, of great importance for education, is that much of the specific knowledge most

useful *today* will almost certainly not be the knowledge most useful *tomorrow*. Past experience no longer necessarily provides us with a safe guide for future action.

In other words, we can no longer give a confident answer to Herbert Spencer's question, "What knowledge is of the most use?" So far as secondary education is concerned, no group of educators, no matter how well-informed and reasonable, can set out the specific skills and knowledge that all students must possess in order to graduate from high school.

If we pretended that we *could*, we would be operating our schools for a world that no longer exists.

## Learn to learn

The certainty of rapid change means that an essential ability for *everyone* will be the ability to learn, to relearn, and to learn again—to adapt to the new situations that the future will constantly create.

It will not be of fundamental importance that all high school students study History or Physics or English Literature or Latin—or any other specific subject. But it *will* be of vital importance that they learn how to learn.

To be able to learn, one must have the appropriate intellectual and communication skills, and, most especially, confidence that one *can* learn and the feeling that learning is important and satisfying.

## Personal decision

Obviously, to learn how to learn, one must learn *something*. But the best subjects for developing the skills and attitudes that make learning possible for *one* student are not necessarily the best for all students.

And it is not the Ministry of Education, nor the school board, nor even the school principal, who alone should make this very personal choice, but *the student and his parents*. Every student differs in his background, his interests, his abilities, and his goals—and who but the student and his parents is really able to appreciate all of these differences?

Therefore Herbert Spencer's question—"What knowledge is of the most

use?"—can only be answered by the individual. Actually, this has always been the case; but previously, the feeling that some kinds of knowledge were a better preparation for the future than other kinds often led educators to put aside these individual considerations.

But there is no longer any reason for not allowing the interests, abilities, and aspirations of individual students to be the major considerations in establishing a high school program.

Ontario's new Credit System recognizes this principle. The new diploma requirements do not demand any specific "package" or group of subjects. Instead, they give the student and his parents the greatest possible choice from among the courses a particular school may be able to offer.

The only restriction imposed by the Ministry of Education is a provision to prevent excessive specialization and ensure some basic breadth in the diploma program.

## Individuality

There are many other equally important reasons for changing to the Credit System. One of these concerns human individuality.

It is a fact that no two individuals are identical, especially in those qualities of mind and spirit that make us most human. But this uniqueness has not always been recognized. Often students have been "processed" or "handled" as if they were parts of a homogeneous mass rather than individuals.

But today, people everywhere are insisting on the recognition of their own individuality. This growing demand is a potent social force which all institutions must sooner or later accommodate.

This is especially true of schools. The young people in our classrooms must be made to feel that their school contributes significantly to personal fulfillment. The school cannot do this without recognizing the individuality of its students, and adapting its program to meet this individuality.

If a school adopts a "processing" approach, insisting on a common "best" program for everyone, it will be met with quiet indifference—or worse, with open hostility. In either case, its value as a



social institution will be lost. It will be considered—and will in fact become—irrelevant to the deepest needs of its students.

#### **Involvement**

Another aspect of this growing emphasis on individuality is the demand for meaningful involvement and participation. People no longer passively accept decisions concerning themselves and their communities. Everywhere, the demand for participation in the decision-making process is growing.

The students in our high schools are not immune to this. They do need and expect educators to give leadership and advice, but if the school fails to involve students in the decisions that will affect their personal futures, then again the school will be shrugged off or met with hostility.

The Credit System provides the framework within which schools can respond to these new demands.

#### **Individuality**

This desire for more individuality and involvement in education is legitimate, but obviously it must be *responsible* involvement.

Because schools deal with young people at a critical stage of their development, they must adopt, as a major goal, the development of individual responsibility among their students.

The Credit System is designed to create opportunities for all students to exercise responsibility in significant decisions relating to their own courses and their preparation for the future.

#### **Responsibility**

Another pressing concern of our society is the need for creative and innovative solutions to the problems we face. The essence of creativity is the ability to relate facts and ideas in new and different ways.

The traditional organization of high schools—with each subject taught in isolation, and the subjects fixed into prescribed diploma programs—has not encouraged students to combine concepts and insights from different fields. To this extent, it may have inhibited the development of creativity.

The very flexibility of the new Credit System should help dispel these inhibitions and promote creativity. Individual schools now have an opportunity to offer innovative approaches to courses of study; individual students now have an opportunity to use imagination and foresight in assembling their own programs.

#### **Creativity**

No two students are alike. They have different kinds of intelligence and patterns of logic. This has been increasingly true in recent years, as more and more students from various backgrounds have

stayed in school longer.

It is unreasonable to think that they will all grow and learn in the same way, or at the same rate.

Thus each school must develop new kinds of learning experiences that go beyond the approaches that have been traditional in our high schools. Each school must devise the kinds of courses that seem best suited to further the learning of *its own* students.

Parents and students must then be able to put together a diploma program—choosing from the courses offered—that fits the particular learning capabilities and objectives of each student.

The fact that all students are different is a vital reason why, under the Credit System, it is the individual *school* that bears the major responsibility for adapting the curriculum to best suit the individual needs of its students—not the Ministry of Education or even the school board. Since the individual *school* is closest to the students, it is in a unique position to accommodate and react to student needs and abilities.

#### **Individualizing programs**

Although education in Ontario is compulsory to the end of the school year in which the student turns sixteen, we are rapidly reaching the point where almost the entire population to age 18 will attend secondary school, and not just a select portion as in the past.

In response to this trend, schools must make a concerted effort to design courses for *all* students and, at the same time, avoid categorizing and labelling students who choose to concentrate on studies other than the traditional academic subjects. The school should discourage any tendency to label students according to the courses they have chosen—a practice that has often, in the past, made some students feel that their status and expectations were crystallized even before their adult life began.

This risk is greatly reduced under the new Credit System. Because of the curricular flexibility it gives to both the school and the student, there will be far more inter-mixing of students and subjects than ever before. Undesirable labels will largely become a thing of the past. □

# what is the credit system?

To obtain a Secondary School Graduation Diploma, the student must earn a minimum of 27 credits.

A credit is given on the "successful completion of a course containing work that normally would be completed after 110 to 120 hours of scheduled time." (The 110-120 hours is the classroom time involved when a subject is given a conventional 40-minute period each day throughout the school year.)

The time is stated in total *hours*—rather than in 40-minute class *periods*—so that schools may have maximum flexibility in meeting this requirement.

Forty minutes a day all through the school year might be ideal for some subjects. But in other subjects, one-hour periods might be better, for example. Or in some subjects the best approach might be to schedule two 40-minute periods a day for half a year. There are many variations.

Notice that the credit is not fulfilled by simply putting in the stated amount of time: a credit is earned only when the "work" normally done in that time is successfully completed. If the work is done in less time, the principal can award the credit. Conversely, the credit cannot be given until the work is done, even if *more* time is required. And the

work must be successfully completed according to the standards set for the specific course.

*There is no implication in the Credit System of lowered standards or of credit for passive attendance.* Students who do not work hard will be no more successful under the Credit System than they were previously.

Most courses are at present valued at 1 or 2 credits. But some courses may be valued at 1½ or ½ or 2½ credits—or any other value, depending on the amount of work they represent.

## Credits needed

The Secondary School Graduation Diploma requires a student to earn at least 27 credits. This number of credits is normally earned after four years in a secondary school.

Normally, a student will earn seven credits a year if he successfully completes courses occupying seven of the eight instructional periods commonly available each day. This workload has been traditional for most students in Ontario high schools for many years.

To earn a Secondary School Honour Graduation Diploma, a student must earn at least six *additional* credits in "honour diploma level" work. These are

normally earned in the fifth year of secondary school, although as more advantage is taken of summer schools and of the flexibility of the Credit System, students will increasingly undertake at least part of this work before their fifth year.

The numbers of credits mentioned for both diplomas are *minimums*. Students are encouraged where possible to take *more* than the minimum, and many do—particularly in preparation for the basic Secondary School Graduation Diploma. Almost all secondary schools are organized so that the willing and able student can take on more than the minimum requirement.

## Ensuring breadth

The new requirements for the Secondary School Graduation Diploma are based on two primary principles:

(1) Every student should have some exposure to each of the major fields of human knowledge.

(2) At the same time, each student should have the greatest possible opportunity to follow a program that furthers his personal interests and aspirations.

To meet these two aims, each sec-

## Secondary schools must group courses into four categories

### Communications

"Studies that are primarily concerned with man's interchange of thought and with all modes of human expression."

(Examples—English, Data Processing, Drafting, Français, German, Latin, Shorthand.)

### Social and Environmental Studies

"Studies that are primarily concerned with man's unique nature and his interaction with his environment and his fellows."

(Examples—Economics, Geography, History, Retail Merchandising, People and Politics, World Religions.)

### Pure and Applied Sciences

"Studies and related skills that are primarily concerned with the properties of matter and energy, the conditions of their interaction, and the application of this understanding to the solution of practical problems."

(Examples—Elements of Technology, Horticulture, Industrial Arts, Mathematics, Sciences, Space and Man.)

### Arts

"Studies concerned with the aesthetic nature of man and the creative expression of that nature."

(Examples—Arts, Floriculture, Graphic Arts, Music, Physical and Health Education, Screen Education, Theatre Arts.)

To ensure a well-rounded high school education, all students must earn at least 3 credits from each of these four categories (making a total of 12 credits). The remainder of the 27 credits required for a Secondary School Graduation Diploma may be earned by choosing subjects from any of the four categories.

ondary school is required to group its courses into four categories—*Communications, Social and Environmental Studies, Pure and Applied Sciences, and Arts*—as shown on the chart below.

Most secondary school subjects fall naturally into one of these categories. But some innovative courses may not, and in these cases the school principal will categorize such courses himself.

To ensure a basic well-rounded education, students must take *some* subjects from each category.

- First-year students must take at least one credit from each of the four categories (4 credits).
- In their second year, students must *also* take at least one credit from each of the four categories (4 more credits).
- In *subsequent* years, students must take at least one further credit from each of the four categories (4 more credits).

Thus, on his way to earning the minimum 27 credits required for the Secondary School Graduation Diploma, every student will have taken at least three credits from among the *Communications* courses offered, three from the *Social and Environmental Studies*, three from the *Pure or Applied Sciences*, and three from the *Arts* field.

These account for 12 credits. The remaining 15 credits (to make a minimum of 27 for graduation) may be taken from any of the four categories, depending only on the direction the student wishes to pursue and the availability of courses in the school.

This arrangement means that each student will have some experience in each of the major areas of human knowledge, and at the same time will be able to develop a particular interest in some depth if he wishes.

This does not mean that students must specialize. Most will divide the unallocated credits fairly evenly among the four areas. But the possibility of considerable concentration *does* exist for those with a particular interest in one or two areas.

While provincial requirements demand that students earn at least three credits from each of the four categories, they do not specify the particular subjects to be taken in each area. To satisfy

the *Communications* requirement, for example, one student might take three credits in English; another student might take two credits in French and one in Latin, while yet another might take one credit in English, one in Business Correspondence, and one in Shorthand, and so on.

#### **Compulsory subjects**

Some principals and parents feel strongly that certain subjects should be compulsory in the diploma program. In such cases, particular subjects *can* be made compulsory for students who are not eighteen, *provided the parents and the principal agree*.

This provision is stated in the following terms in a Ministry of Education publication (Circular H.S.1):

*"Within this framework (i.e., of 27 credits minimum, distributed as indicated), the principal may make specific prescriptions with the approval of the parents, on the basis of a student's needs and the facilities and courses available."*

The only specific subject requirements in the provincial diploma regulations apply to the secondary schools in which French is the language of instruction. For students in these schools, English or Anglais is a required subject.

#### **Post-secondary opportunities**

Students intending to go to college or university must obviously keep admission requirements in mind when selecting their high school courses.

It is an obligation of the principal to make known to students and parents the kind of diploma program that will keep open the maximum number of post-secondary opportunities, as well as the subject choices that offer the best preparation for specific types of post-secondary training.

Most schools make this information known in school calendars or special brochures accompanying option sheets.

Students and their parents should study these recommendations carefully. They must accept full responsibility if they choose subjects other than those recommended. While principals and teachers are expected to give advice, it is important to remember that subject choices are ultimately the responsibility of parents and the individual student.

## **Have all schools adopted the credit system in the same way?**

No. Flexibility is the keyword of the Credit System, and this carries through to the program of each school. Schools are being encouraged to offer the types and levels of courses that best fit *their* students.

A school in the downtown area of a large city, for example, would not be expected to offer exactly the same kinds of courses as a school in a smaller rural community. A technical school, or a composite high school, has the facilities to offer a wider range of practical subjects than does a collegiate.

Or, for example, students in one school may express a particular interest in one or two specific courses—perhaps a new course such as *World Religions* or an older subject such as *Latin*—and these courses would be offered because of sufficient student interest. But in a neighbouring school they might not be available, simply because of minimal student interest.

A basic characteristic of *all* schools, however, is the provision of subjects that the people of the community consider fundamental to learning and maturity. For many, this would include such subjects as *English, History, Mathematics, Science, Geography, and Physical Education*.

In some schools, principals and teachers are suggesting that a few specific subjects be “compulsory”. These recommendations often arise from such factors as the principal’s philosophy of education or his understanding of the needs of his students, or the staff and resources available in the school. Parents are well-advised to heed such recommendations.

On the other hand, no school may insist that a specific subject is compulsory for a student—unless the parent (or the student, if he is 18 or over) agrees.

# diplomas

The Credit System brings a new approach to the issuing of Secondary School Graduation Diplomas. It is an approach that is much *fairer* to many more students—and it is an approach that will result in a higher quality education for everyone.

Until now, there have been several types of Secondary School Graduation Diplomas—each one representing a specific range of subject content.\* Each diploma had a core of compulsory subjects, plus certain options that students could select from a defined list. For each subject, the Ministry of Education issued a detailed “course of study” that specified what was to be taught and the level of achievement expected.

Thus each student choosing a specific diploma program—and therefore a specific range of subjects—was required to pass successfully *all* subjects in the package. He could not afford to miss even *one* of the subjects specified by the Ministry of Education—even though he might be extremely successful in all others—if he expected to earn a graduation diploma.

An *occupational* student, for example, might excel in the practical subjects that were the core of his program, but lack interest and ability in the specified “academic” subjects. The result: he could never earn a graduation diploma, no matter how excellent his work in his core subjects.

Similar examples could be cited of students taking a primarily *academic* course, students who did well in *most* subjects, but who just could not master one of the “compulsory” subjects. The result was the same. Students who demonstrated *overall* achievement in relation to their ability could be deprived of a graduation diploma.

This undesirable situation does not exist with the *new* graduation diploma under the Credit System. The main difference is that the Ministry of Education no longer specifies that every student “shall take” a defined list of subjects each year to qualify for a diploma.

As explained on page 5 of this booklet, a student (in collaboration with his parents and the school) is now able to choose a package of subjects suited to his particular abilities. If he clearly has no ability or interest in a particular subject, he is not “required” to take it—provided he makes up at least 27 credits in the manner described on page 5. In other words, a graduation diploma is now within reach of *all* students who

\*There were specific diplomas for both the 4-year and 5-year programs in each of the three “branches”—Arts and Science; Science, Technology and Trades; and Business and Commerce.



truly work at the subjects they have chosen.

### One diploma

Further, there is now only *one* basic Secondary School Graduation Diploma, not several as before. Every student who earns 27 credits in the prescribed manner (page 5) is on an equal footing, and receives his Graduation Diploma with a full sense of achievement.

In a sense, the Graduation Diploma is becoming analogous to the Bachelor of Arts degree. The B.A., for all who hold it, is a social symbol indicating graduation from university. There is wide variation in the content and achievement implied by different B.A.s, but this seldom affects the social significance of the degree.

Similarly, the Secondary School Graduation Diploma becomes a symbol of the successful completion of general secondary education—a symbol of individual achievement related to individual ability.

### Honour diploma

Since many university and college courses still demand specific achievement in specific subjects, a Secondary School *Honour* Graduation Diploma will continue to be offered in Ontario.

Retaining much of its traditional significance, this diploma is awarded for the successful completion of six credits of honour graduation level (former grade 13) work.

Although teachers have more flexibility than formerly in developing their honour graduation level courses in appropriate directions, the academic standards of the courses are maintained by local supervisory officials at the level traditionally associated with grade 13.

### Standards

Overall, standards in secondary education are being raised under the Credit System, although, in many cases, today's standards may not be measured by the same yardsticks that applied 20 or more years ago.

An essential feature of the Credit System is that it does not require all students to take the same subjects in order to earn a Secondary School Graduation Diploma. Students who are unable to master certain subjects are no longer forced to reach for levels beyond their grasp.

It follows, therefore, that some students will graduate from secondary school without achieving levels in particular subjects which some people consider minimal.

This does not mean reduced standards—quite the opposite, in fact. With the

new flexibility (and the increased sense of commitment that students feel towards their own programs), many students are achieving at levels *above* what we have been used to in traditional Ontario high schools. And perhaps more importantly, these students are joined at graduation by many others who would ordinarily have dropped out at age 16.

Concern has been expressed by some people that, under the Credit System with its freer choice of subjects, students might choose simpler courses and turn away from the "substantial" subjects. The facts should allay these concerns: schools that have been on the Credit System for one to three years have maintained enrolment in the so-called basic subjects very well. In fact it appears that students—left more to their own discretion in choosing their subjects—are actually choosing more difficult and challenging courses than they might otherwise have taken.

### Student records

Student records kept by schools have been revised and considerably improved this year.

The new Record System was developed in recognition of society's changing views about a citizen's right of access to information that has been collected about him, and the realization that information about an individual is his private property.

Beginning this year, the Ontario School Record System will include much less personal information. Also, parents and students may now inspect their Records, and may appeal if they feel that inaccurate or unfair information is included.

The Record and the information it contains is now private to the student and the school. Legislation was recently passed to guard this confidentiality. Except for parents of children under age 18, no one may see the Record without the permission of the student.

Each record folder will describe in detail the programs and courses taken by the student, and his achievement in them. These portions of the Record may be duplicated to form a transcript of achievement which can be used by the student when applying for admission to college or university, or when applying for employment.

Thus, while the new Secondary School Graduation Diploma does not list specific courses taken by the student, the new Student Record *does*.

### Continuing evaluation

The Ministry of Education is under no illusion that the Credit System as it now stands will necessarily be the "final

answer" for secondary school education. A major research and evaluation program has been initiated in order to monitor developments very closely, and, if it becomes clear that some aspect of the Credit System needs refinement, changes will be made without delay.

This year, for example, the Ministry has funded special research studies on such topics as the effect of the Credit System on subject choice, social and achievement patterns of students in schools organized on the Credit System, and post-secondary achievement of students who have graduated from Credit System secondary schools.

The Ministry has also adopted a significant new procedure to ensure that curriculum in Ontario schools is kept up to date and relevant. Known as *Cyclic Review*, it guarantees that every aspect of the curriculum is closely re-examined on a regular and systematic basis. Every six years, the program at each level of our school system will be analyzed in depth.

For an entire year preceding the review, the Ministry will actively solicit the opinions and suggestions of every group concerned with the particular level of curriculum being examined—parents, teachers, students, education officials, and any organization or individual interested in public education. This procedure is a virtual guarantee that the curriculum in Ontario schools will not become outdated or irrelevant to students' needs and interests.

Cyclic Review of the Intermediate Division curriculum (formerly grades 7 to 10) began this September. Review of the Senior Division (grades 11 to 13) will begin in 1974. In both cases, the Credit System will be subjected to searching examination and evaluation. □



# questions answered

## *Who thought of the Credit System in the first place?*

The original planning began in the mid sixties when an increasing number of principals and teachers complained that the system then in effect was not meeting the needs of all students.

These principals and teachers were asking the Ministry of Education with increasing frequency for permission to break the "rules" in order to accommodate individual students and to try variations in programs which they felt particular situations required.

## *Is the Credit System experimental?*

The Credit System is not experimental, but neither is it rigidly fixed. Planning began five years ago, and the System has been gradually implemented in Ontario high schools over the last three years. There are already several research projects under way to determine the effects of the new system; if refinements are needed, they will be made.

But the Credit System is not an experiment; it is actually a logical outgrowth of our previous system, with more flexibility to make it more responsive to students' individual capabilities and interests. It is perhaps a somewhat overdue response to social change.

## *Why aren't there any compulsory subjects?*

Any subject may be made compulsory for a particular student—if his or her parents so desire. Under the Credit System, the decision for making certain subjects compulsory for a particular student has been shifted from the Ministry of Education to the individual parents.

The Ministry no longer presumes to be able to dictate what is "best" for all students. It is the parent who must now decide, in collaboration with the school and the student.

## *Do teachers now have to develop their own curriculum?*

Yes, teachers now have much more freedom to adapt their courses of study in ways that best fit their own classes. Good teachers have always done this to some extent, and the new policy under the Credit System is designed to encourage all teachers to do so.

The curriculum guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education no longer specify in great detail the precise topics that should be included in each course; they concentrate, instead, on the overall approach and philosophy. They also suggest possible topics, resource materials, and the general organization of courses.

Teachers are further assisted by Ministry Program Consultants who are specialists in each of the major subject fields. They are located in each region of the province, and they work with groups of teachers and local school board officials to assist in curriculum development.

The new policy certainly places greater demands on the professional skills of teachers, and not all will be able to adapt immediately. But in time, all will acquire this extra dimension which is so important in tailoring the school's program to its students' needs.

## *Can students transfer from one school to another?*

The establishment of secondary school attendance boundaries and the transfer of students from one area to another are matters that are settled by the locally elected boards of education. For orderly administration, most boards require that students attend the secondary school in their own area. But almost all boards will permit transfers from one school to another if a particular subject or program requested by the student is unavailable in the school that he would normally attend.

## *What is happening to discipline?*

The Credit System, in itself, has nothing to do with discipline and student deportment. The atmosphere of a school does not depend on the extent to which students are allowed to control the selection of their own subjects; it depends much more on the attitudes of the students, the school staff, and the community, and on the intangibles that affect human behaviour everywhere.

Students' discipline may be easy-going or strict whether the school's program be conventional or highly innovative. But it is a common observation that, under the Credit System, many of the trivial disciplinary problems that have often occupied the time of school officials are disappearing.

When a student and his parents select the program that is best suited to that student—and are committed to it by their own choice rather than by a higher authority—there is much less reason for rebellion or sullen resistance.

## *Are students still getting the "fundamentals"?*

The elementary school program is devoted predominantly to what most parents would agree are the "fundamentals". Secondary schools now consider that their primary objective is to give students the skills and attitudes necessary to allow them to learn through-

out their lives; this is surely the most "fundamental" of objectives.

However, in a rapidly changing society it is difficult to designate any specific subject as more "fundamental" than another. All subjects can be suitable vehicles for developing this fundamental objective.

All schools provide courses in the traditional academic subjects. If parents regard these as "fundamental", then they can be made a compulsory part of their children's diploma program.

But it is important to remember that in a world dominated by electronic communications and the pocket calculator, traditional ideas about "fundamental" knowledge and skills may no longer be applicable.

## *Do the ceilings on educational spending restrict implementation of the Credit System?*

It is quite possible to implement all the essential features of the Credit System, within the present ceilings on education spending.

It should be remembered that the Credit System requires organizational and philosophical changes in the school. These innovations require certain changes in procedure, but do not in themselves create significant extra expenditure.

## *How are students being graded?*

Grading practices vary considerably from school to school. Since schools are now encouraged to adapt the curriculum to suit their own students, it follows that they must also be able to set the standards and grading methods that best suit the courses they offer.

In some schools, formal examinations, set three or four times a year, still play an important role. In many others, the formal examination is being phased out or confined to the senior grades and the success of the student determined by his day-to-day work and his performance in a variety of assignments.

## *Will most students take "traditional" subjects now that they are not forced to do so?*

Some Ontario secondary schools have now been on the Credit System for more than three years. In these schools, interest in the traditional subjects has held up extremely well.

English, Mathematics, Science, History, Geography, and French attract almost as many students as they did when many of these subjects were compulsory.

If given sound advice by the school, very few students and parents make irresponsible choices. □